DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 739 CE 075 390

AUTHOR	Albelda, Randy
TITLE	In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform. Research-in-Brief.
INSTITUTION	Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1997-12-00
NOTE	8p.; Based on the report, "In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts" by MaryAnn Allard, Mary Ellen Colten, Randy Albelda, and Carol Cosenza.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1400 20th St., N.W., Suite 104, Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; *Battered Women; Compliance (Legal); *Family Violence; Federal Legislation; Marital Instability; Socioeconomic Status; *State Legislation; *Welfare Recipients
IDENTIFIERS	Welfare Reform

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in Massachusetts to determine the effect of some welfare policy changes among families who receive public assistance and have experienced domestic violence. Interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 734 Massachusetts women who received welfare between January and June 1996. The survey found that one-fifth of the women interviewed reported abuse by a husband or boyfriend within the past 12 months, and 65 percent of the women surveyed have been victims of domestic violence at some time in their lives, compared to an estimate of 20 percent of the general adult female population. Abused women were likely to have the following characteristics: having had disagreements with current or husbands or boyfriends, especially concerning child custody; having experienced violence as a child; having been married; and having had their first child at a slightly younger age (20.4 years) than women who had not been abused. Abused women were also more likely to have a child with a disability or to have a disability themselves and to have emotional and psychological problems. Welfare reforms aimed at eroding the safety net, requiring work, setting time limits, requiring paternity provisions, and requiring compliance with other welfare requirements may be too burdensome for abused women, who may thereby be pushed off welfare and into remaining in abusive situations. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 420 739

In Harm's Way?
Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform

Research-in-Brief

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Braunstein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

CE075390

In Harm's Way?
Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform

During the Massachusetts debate concerning welfare reform in 1993-95, groups that work with victims of domestic violence voiced concern over some of the policy changes and the potential impact they might have among families who receive public assistance and have experienced domestic violence. Members of the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence formed a working group that asked the Center for Social Policy Research at the McCormack Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston to undertake a study of the prevalence of domestic violence among the TAFDC (Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children — the state's welfare program) population. The University of Massachusetts Boston's Center for Survey Research designed a survey and, with access provided by the state's Department of Transitional Assistance, interviewed a representative sample of 734 Massachusetts women who received TAFDC between January and June, 1996. This Research-in-Brief summarizes the important findings from that survey.

There has been a growing concern over the high incidence of domestic violence in the population in general and among women who receive public assistance in particular. When women leave violent spouses, it is often difficult for them to maintain employment and ties with their extended family; it should therefore come as no surprise that cash assistance programs for abused women and their children are vital safety nets. And, while many practitioners have known about the existence of domestic violence among AFDC recipients, the extent of domestic violence has not been well documented. Estimating the prevalence of domestic violence among welfare recipients is only beginning to get underway. Jody Raphael, of the Taylor Institute in Chicago, Illinois, a leader in this research area, found much anecdotal information about domestic violence and welfare in an informal survey of 15 states, but stressed that an analysis of the extent of domestic violence and the characteristics of women on welfare is critically needed (Raphael 1995). In addition, Susan Lloyd (1996), of Northwestern University, has examined the effects of violence on women's employment in one low-income Chicago neighborhood. The information reported here comes from the first survey designed to measure the prevalence of domestic violence among a representative sample of welfare recipients. The survey instrument, techniques, and sampling procedure used constitute a major breakthrough and provide the first estimates in the U.S. of the extent of domestic violence among women receiving public assistance in any state.

The findings are very disturbing. A substantial percentage of women in Massachusetts receiving TAFDC are recent victims of domestic violence. *One-fifth of the women interviewed reported abuse by a husband or boyfriend or former husband or boyfriend within the past twelve months, based on the definition of domestic violence provided by Massachusetts law under the 1978 Abuse Prevention Act.* In this study, a woman is counted as abused if she indicated she had been subjected to one of the following six behaviors by a current or former husband or boyfriend: hit, slapped or kicked; thrown or shoved onto the floor, against a wall, or down stairs; hurt badly enough to go to the doctor; he used a gun, knife or other object in a way that made her afraid; she was forced to have sex or engaged in sexual activity against her will; or she was made to

Table 1. Percent of Respondents Experiencing Abuse Behavior Ever and Within the Past 12 Months

Has any Current or Former Boyfreind or Husband Ever...	Ever Happened	Happened in the Past 12 Months
1. ...made you think that you might be hurt by him?	45.6%	14.5%
2. ...destroyed or taken your possesions or things of value to you?	40.1%	9.2%
3. ...hit, slapped, or kicked you?	53.2%	11.4%
4. ...thrown or shoved you onto the floor, against the wall, or down stairs?	47.1%	10.7%
5. ...tried to keep you from seeing or talking with your friends or family?	39.7%	9.0%
6. ...hurt you badly enough that you went to a doctor or clinic?	21.1%	3.5%
7. ...used a gun, knife, or other object in a way that made you afraid?	25.7%	4.3%
8. ...forced you to have sex or engage in sexual activity against your will?	28.2%	3.9%
9. ...consistently told you that you were worthless or called you names in order to make you feel bad about yourself as a person?	52.7%	15.3%

Source: Unviersity of Massachusetts, Boston, February 1997.

think she might be hurt. Table 1 shows the percent of respondents who report each of these types of abusive behaviors. *Most of the women surveyed, 65 percent, have been victims of domestic violence by a boyfriend or husband or former boyfriend or husband at some time in their lives,* compared to an estimate of 20 percent of the general adult female population (IWPR, Victim Services, and the Domestic Violence Training Project, 1996).

The survey also indicated that many women are embroiled in conflicts with a former or current boyfriend or husband. Well over half (55 percent) have taken out a restraining order against a current or former boyfriend or husband. One-third of those (33 percent), which is 18 percent of the total sample, have had a restraining order in effect in the past year. The majority (56 percent) report ever having called the police because of being hurt or threatened by a current or former boyfriend or husband, while 18 percent had called in the past year.

This survey confirms that domestic violence is more the rule than the exception in the lives of welfare recipients. And while this survey was done only in Massachusetts, there is no reason to believe that domestic violence is any less prevalent throughout the country.

Characteristics of Abused Women Versus Non-abused Women

Among the welfare recipients interviewed, women who had ever been abused differ from non-abused women in several important ways. A substantial percentage of women who reported being abused also report disagreements with current or former husbands or boyfriends. Of those who said they were subjected to abusive behaviors in the last 12 months, 52 percent reported problems or arguments over custody, visitation or support of a child. Among those who were abused prior to the last twelve months, 40 percent reported experiencing conflicts over children compared with 20 percent of those who were never abused.

Abused women were also much more likely to report that they were exposed to violence as children in their homes. More than a third (35 percent) of women who were abused as adults, compared to 17 percent of those never abused, reported that when they were growing up, an adult in their household kicked, bit or hit them with a fist; hit or tried to hit them with something; beat up, choked, burned or scalded them. A similar percentage (34 for abused and 15 percent for non-abused) reported these occurrences between the adults in their household.

Table 2 summarizes some other significant differences between women who had been abused and those who had not. Abused women are more likely to have ever been married (47 percent for abused versus 32 for non-abused) and, on average, had their first child at a slightly younger age (20.4 years for abused versus 21.1 years for non-abused). White women are more likely to report that they have ever been abused than are nonwhite women in the sample: 75 percent of white, 54 percent of Hispanic, 57 percent of African American, and 63 percent of women of other race/ethnicity report abuse. Women reporting abuse are significantly more likely to have a child with a disability that limits the child's activity and to report that they themselves have a physical disability, handicap, or other serious physical, mental or emotional problems.

Table 2. Selected Characteristics of Sample by Abuse Status

Characteristic	Total Sample (n=734)	Ever Abused[1] (n=476)	Never Abused[1] (n=258)
Race***			
White, not Hispanic	44.8%	52.1%	31.4%
Black, not Hispanic	19.6%	17.4%	23.6%
Hispanic	31.9%	26.8%	41.1%
Other, not Hispanic	3.7%	3.6%	3.9%
Mean age at birth of first child*	20.6 yrs	20.4 yrs	21.1 yrs
Ever married***	41.7%	47.1%	31.8%
Currently has a physical disability, handicap, or other serious physical, mental, or emotional problem**	28.1%	31.7%	21.4%
Has a child with an ongoing disability that limits his/her activities ***	28.8%	33.7%	19.8%
Has a child whose disabilities keeps her/him out of regular school***	11.7%	14.8%	6.3%

[1] A respondent is defined as "abused" if she reported experiencing any of following six behaviors by a current or former husband or boyfriend: hit, slapped or kicked; thrown or shoved onto the floor, against a wall, or down stairs; hurt badly enough to go to the doctor; he used a gun, knife or other object in a way that made her afraid; she was forced to have sex or engaged in sexual activity against her will; or made to think she may be hurt.

Statistically significant differences between ever abused and never abused:

*p .05 **p .01 ***p .001

Source: University of Massachusetts, Boston, February 1997.

While almost all TAFDC recipients (88 percent) have held a job, abused women are slightly more likely to have worked (91 percent versus 83 percent) and to have worked full-time (74 percent versus 65 percent) than those not reporting abuse. Abused women were also much more likely to report that a current or former boyfriend would not like them to go to school or work (16 percent versus two percent).

Finally, women who reported being abused scored significantly lower in measures of well being than women not reporting abuse. Abused women tend to have lower self-esteem, less sense of mastery, and show more symptoms of emotional distress, based on three well-validated indicators widely used in general population studies (Rosenberg 1965, Pearlin 1981, and Fowler, 1996).

Still, many characteristics of women who have suffered domestic violence are not statistically different from those who have not. They do not differ in their current educational or training status; age; number of children; whether they are living in a homeless shelter or in public housing; or in their expressing an interest in going to work or school.

Emotional and Psychological Problems

Besides documenting the high prevalence of domestic violence among welfare recipients, this survey revealed emotional and psychological problems consistent with those in the research literature on domestic violence, especially low self-esteem. Although these problems are not necessarily caused by domestic violence, they are clearly associated with domestic violence.

The effects of the trauma experienced by domestic violence victims have also been associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a disorder originally described in war veterans. Symptoms of PTSD have been documented by Raphael (1995) in her studies of domestic violence among AFDC recipients. She notes that it is difficult for women on welfare to get rid of the terror of the abuser, such as fearing that he will show up unexpectedly at their work training program. The symptoms of PTSD that Raphael has observed include poor concentration, markedly diminished interest in significant activities, and a sense of a foreshortened future. Judith Herman, a psychiatrist specializing in psychological trauma and trauma recovery, notes the trauma of violence can seriously affect the ability of the victim to concentrate and to work (1992).

The authors of the Better Homes Foundation longitudinal study in Worcester, Massachusetts, of homeless and low-income housed women (many of whom receive welfare) found that the lifetime prevalence of a major depressive disorder, PTSD, or alcohol or other drug abuse was higher for these low-income women, whether homeless or housed, compared to women in the general population. Most of the women in this study had been victims of violence. The lifetime prevalence of PTSD was three times higher than in the general population. Nearly one-third of the homeless and one-quarter of the housed mothers reported that they had made at least one suicide attempt during their lifetime (Bassuk, Browne and Buckner 1996).

It is important to note, however, that even though the impact of domestic violence on the lives of women and their children is severe, recovery can and does occur. The length of time it takes to recover is difficult to determine, since it does not necessarily follow a simple progression.

Domestic Violence and Welfare Reform

The literature on the impact of domestic violence coupled with the findings in this survey suggest that several aspects of the new welfare reform legislation, at both the state and the federal level, are likely to create impediments to economic self-sufficiency and might even create situations that place families directly in harm's way.

The data confirm that an enormously high proportion of women receiving TAFDC are contending with domestic abuse and/or its aftermath. In fact, more women in the sample have been victims than not. These women and their children may remain at physical and psychological risk from their past abuse and abuser(s) or from men in present or future relationships. These findings pose several serious concerns for welfare reform.

- *Eroding the safety net.* The stigmatization of welfare receipt and many new requirements contained in Massachusetts and other states might discourage women from seeking public assistance or prevent them from receiving it. Welfare reform may unintentionally serve to keep some women

from leaving an abusive situation or may cause some to return to one by making women more financially dependent on men.

- *Workfare.* Massachusetts and the federal legislation require (unless states specifically opt out) that nonexempt recipients find work or a workfare placement within two months of receipt of assistance. This activity may not be safe for current or recent victims of domestic violence, because batterers are sometimes reluctant to allow their victims to gain economic independence. Any steps toward entry into the workforce threaten the abuser's control. For women or their children who have the severe emotional or physical trauma often associated with domestic violence, immediate work may not be achievable. Further, many women, especially those involved in disputes over custody, may be reluctant to leave their children, even with a babysitter or in a day care setting, where they themselves cannot protect the children from being taken by the abuser. The threat of taking their children is frequently made by abusers to maintain control over their victims.

- *Time limits.* For some recent or severely traumatized families, Massachusetts' state limit of 24 months (over a five-year period) and the federal lifetime limit of five years for receipt of public assistance may not be long enough. Many scenarios that accompany domestic violence suggest that a strict cutoff may be unrealistic and possibly harmful. Once women leave a battering situation, it is not uncommon for batterers to stalk them for a long period after the separation, making it impossible for victims to take jobs or to keep jobs without risk. Batterers often create disturbances in workplaces, harass women at work, or prevent women from getting to work reliably and on time. Many victims are forced to move repeatedly and to leave jobs as a result of their abuser's continued endangerment. Further, the depression and emotional stress experienced by abused women present another set of impediments.

- *Paternity provisions.* Massachusetts, and many other states, have tightened the requirements around establishing paternity and heightened child support enforcement. Requiring both parents to take financial and physical responsibility for children is something that few would frown on. For victims of domestic violence, however, reestablishing a connection with a father who is also a former batterer, could be very dangerous. Typically, recipients are advised of the consequences of not cooperating; they are rarely advised of the consequences of establishing paternity, such as the father's right to seek visitation or custody. The data reported here reveal that many abused women, and the majority of recently abused women, are currently in active conflict over custody, child support, and visitation. Activating or reactivating contact and conflicts with abusive former partners may prove dangerous -- if not fatal -- for some women and their children. While most states and the federal law have "good cause" exemptions for current victims of domestic violence, few women use them (for a variety of reasons including administrative barriers, lack of confidentiality, and discomfort disclosing this type of information to a stranger) and they do not protect women who are not currently (or very recently) being abused.

- *Compliance with welfare reform requirements.* Massachusetts and other states have many requirements that welfare recipients must fulfill in order to receive their full cash benefit. These include providing immunization records for all children ("shotfare"), maintaining school attendance and allowing minimal unauthorized absences for all children up to eighth grade ("learnfare"), performing paid and unpaid work ("workfare"), and not having a child while receiving aid ("family cap"). Research shows that the long-term effects of domestic violence include severe depression, anxiety, and physical illness. The current policies coupled with the known effects of domestic violence on the lives of its victims suggest that a large number of welfare recipients may well be unable, although not necessarily unwilling, to comply with at least some of the major components of the new welfare laws and regulations. Recipients could lose much needed income if they are sanctioned for noncompliance or dropped from the welfare rolls after reaching time limits, and therefore may be forced to return or remain in an abusive situation for financial reasons.

Without attention to these issues, the state will fail to provide programs that allow many women to replace public assistance with earnings -- the stated goal of welfare reform -- and may possibly face reduced federal funds if federal work participation ratios are not met.

First Steps for Change

Welfare policies have not been designed to consider the impact of domestic violence; the new research shows that domestic violence is so prevalent among welfare recipients that policies need to reflect that reality. Some first steps include:

- States need to create welfare programs that can effectively deal with the consequences of domestic violence; the goal should be to create a program that promotes safety and does not increase women's risk from batterers, does not present additional barriers or impediments for women and children leaving an abusive situation, and provides opportunities for women and their children to recover and become self-sufficient.

- Each state should adopt the Family Violence option to the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act; this option allows states to waive any federal or state requirements for any individual whose ability to escape domestic violence would be harmed, or that unfairly penalizes a parent or child who has been a victim of domestic violence. In addition, at the federal level, the family violence exemption could be required of states rather than left at their option.

- States should proactively screen for domestic violence when they interview welfare applicants and set up education campaigns to notify victims of domestic violence that they may be exempt from many welfare reform provisions. If states want to meet the goal of making women on welfare economically self-sufficient under time limits, they will need to set up appropriate counseling and battered women's social services, treatment for depression and emotional trauma, and education and training programs that promote self-sufficiency when victims of domestic violence are ready to participate in them.

- Effective collaboration among the agencies serving low-income women and their children is essential to help victims of domestic violence transition from welfare to self-sufficiency.

References

Bassuk, Ellen, Angela Browne, John Buckner, (1996). Single mothers and welfare. Scientific American, 275(4), 60-67.

Fowler, F.J., Jr. (1996). The Redesign of the National Health Interview Survey. *Public Health Reports*, Volume III, 508-511.

Herman, Judy, (1992). Trauma and recovery. N.Y.: Basic Books.

Institute for Women's Policy Research, with Victims Services, Inc. and Domestic Violence Training Project, (1996). Measuring the Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women and the Cost-Effectiveness of Interventions: An Initial Assessment and Proposals for Further Research. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Lloyd, Susan, (1996). The effects of violence on women's employment. Paper presented at the 18th Annual Research Conference, Pittsburgh, PA. Lloyd is a Research Affiliate with the Joint Center for Poverty Research of Northwestern University and the University of Chicago.

Pearlin, L.I., Lieberman, M.A., Menaghan, E., & Mullan, J.E. (1981). The Stress Process. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 22, 337-356.

Raphael, Jody, (1995). Domestic violence: Telling the untold welfare-to-work story. Chicago: Taylor Institute.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self Image*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

This Research-in-Brief is part of a series by the Insistitute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) which highlights the work of IWPR's affiliates on topics of importance to women. It is based on the report In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt, and Welfare Reform in Massachusetts, *by Mary Ann Allard, Mary Ellen Colten, Randy Albelda, and Carol Cosenza, University of Massachusetts Boston, February 1997. Copies of the report are available for $5.00 and can be obtained from UMass Boston's McCormack Institute, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125. Phone: (617) 287-5550; Fax (617) 287-5544. The factsheet was written by Randy Albelda and formatted by Jill Braunstein in December 1997.*

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, scientific, non-profit organization dedicated to conducting and disseminating research that informs public policy debates affecting women. Members of the Institute receive regular mailings including factsheets such as this. Please contact the Institite for futher information about individual and organizational memberships.